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The situation in the Middle East

Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Letter dated 25 February 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Over the past several days, Palestinian terrorists have escalated their indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israeli towns and villages.

Last Wednesday, 19 February, four Kassam rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip at the southern Israeli town of Sderot, a town that has frequently come under rocket fire since terrorists began using such weapons nearly two years ago. One of the rockets landed at the entrance to a local factory, igniting a powerful explosion that wounded a 43-year-old man and caused substantial physical damage to the factory. Attacks continued the following afternoon, with two more rockets landing in Sderot and one in the community of Netzarim. Yet another barrage of rockets fell on Sunday, one of which landed in an industrial zone not far from the building that houses the Sderot Municipality.

Over the past five months, approximately 220 Kassam rockets and mortar shells have been fired at Israeli civilian towns and villages, terrorizing the local population, inflicting structural damage, and wounding several civilians. Only sheer luck has prevented Israeli casualties from reaching catastrophic levels. The terrorist organization Hamas, which proudly claimed responsibility for the attacks of the past week and which operates openly from Palestinian Authority territory, has promised that such attacks will continue. In a communiqué issued by the group's military wing, Hamas vowed to "continue our jihad and resistance until we cleanse the last iota of the holy soil of Palestine. Our jihad is either victory or martyrdom."

In a separate attack, on Sunday morning a Palestinian terrorist shot dead Sgt. Doron Lev, age 19, as he was bringing tea to other soldiers. Sgt. Lev was shot in the back by a sniper from a distance of a few hundred metres. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine claimed responsibility for the attack.

The above-mentioned attacks come in addition to the unceasing efforts of Palestinian terrorists to infiltrate Israel and carry out ever more deadly assaults on

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Israeli civilians. In recent days, Israeli forces have thwarted scores of attacks, arrested several wanted terrorists, and destroyed several explosives laboratories and weapons depots containing hundreds of kilograms of explosives, scores of lathes used in the manufacture of mortars and Kassam rockets, dozens of explosive devices and dozens of bottles and containers of various chemicals. Countless innocent lives have surely been spared as a result of these counter-terrorism measures.

Despite the continuing threat of attacks on Israeli civilians, and the absolute necessity of taking action to pre-empt them, Israel continues to do everything in its power, often at grave risk to its own personnel, to ensure that its counter-terrorist measures are proportionate and directed at eliminating the threat posed to the civilian population by terrorist organizations. This task is made exceedingly difficult and complicated as the result of the criminal tactic, systematically adopted by terrorist groups in grave violation of international humanitarian law, of placing themselves and their stores of weapons among civilian populated areas, including launching terrorist and live-fire attacks from within or near civilian dwellings, as well as mosques, hospitals and schools. Israel reiterates the importance of condemning this criminally reprehensible tactic which endangers both Israeli and Palestinian civilians, and of holding accountable the criminals who engage in it.

Israel holds the Palestinian leadership responsible for the continuing campaign of terrorism deliberately aimed at Israeli civilians. Rather than fulfilling their obligations under international law, Security Council resolutions, as well as signed commitments reached with Israel, the Palestinian leadership continues to use its power and influence to support and encourage acts of violence against innocent civilians. It is precisely the failure of the Palestinian leadership to take even minimal steps to suppress the terrorist infrastructure that exists in Palestinian territory that compels Israel to act to protect its citizens from the constant threat of terrorism.

No nation can or would tolerate continued indiscriminate rocket fire aimed at its civilian population. Just one rocket landing on a school or a shopping centre could have truly calamitous consequences. Israel's counter-terrorist measures will therefore remain an indispensable aspect of the exercise of its right to self-defence so long as the Palestinian leadership persists in abdicating its responsibilities to fight terrorism, and glorifying its perpetrators as "martyrs" rather than murderers. For the sake of peace in the region for all peoples, Israel calls upon the international community to reaffirm its clear and total rejection of terrorist tactics and to use its authority and influence to compel the Palestinian leadership, and those regimes in the region which sponsor and incite terrorism, to stop all acts of violence and terrorism, in accordance with international law and signed agreements.

I submit this letter in follow-up to numerous letters detailing the campaign of Palestinian terrorism that began in September 2000, which document the criminal terrorist strategy for which the terrorists and their supporters must be held fully accountable.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of this letter circulated as a document of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 36 and 160, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Dan **Gillerman**
Permanent Representative